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Statement by Saskia Kouwenberg
concerning East Timor
25 Oct -13 Nov 1991

This statement is a slightly modified version of the statement I submitted to Prof. Kooijmans, Special Rapporteur Torture of the United Nations.

On the eleventh of November I talked to Prof. Kooijmans in Hotel Turismo, Dili, about what I had seen and heard since my arrival on the 25th October in East Timor. Prof. Kooijmanswas in Dili at that time for an offical three-day visit in his function as Special Rapporteur Torture of the United Nations.
It was suggested by an East Timorese person that I contact the UN Rapporteur because -according to this person- East Timorese people were too afraid to approach him out of fear for reprisals by the Indonesian army.

Before recapitulating what I said that evening to Prof. Kooijmans and giving a short account of the massacre on the 12th November, I will explain the reason of my presence in East Timor, since my status there has led to confusion.

My husband, Russell Anderson, and I lived in Australia for the last three years. We had planned a visit to my family in the Netherlands and to have a holiday in Indonesia on our way to Europe. We intended to fly to Timor (cheapest destination from Darwin/Australia) and then take the boat to Flores, probably Lombok, then Bali and maybe further, depending on our money situation.
We had some -but no detailed- background knowledge about the history and current situation of East Timor but when we heard that our holiday coincided with the widely published visit of the UN/Portugese Parliamentary delegation to East Timor, we decided to be in Dili when the delegation arrived.
I am a free-lance journalist since about 10 years but have published rarely since my arrival in Australia. Two days before we left Darwin I phoned a Dutch daily (Trouw) and a radio broadcaster (VPRO) asking if they were interested in news about the international delegation's visit. In principle they were interested but no concrete arrangements were made.
My husband has journalistic experience with work he did for an environmental radio show at a community radio station in Darwin. He had made no arrangements to work as a journalist in East-Timor.
We both would have continued our holiday had nothing happened in East-Timor. We only became involved as journalists after realizing -which we had not expected- the severity of the situation in this country.

Recapitulation of the talk with Prof. Kooijmans, as I remember it, on 11/11/91:

I tried, by giving concrete examples, to describe:
- a country in which many people seemed to fear daily for the well-being and lives of themselves and/or of family members.
- a country in which many people felt the oppression of their culture in everyday life,
- an occupied country since we saw military , in overwhelming numbers, everywhere.

Note: In the following examples I unfortunately cannot give names of the people I spoke with or heard of. There are two major reasons for this: to protect the safety of these people and because quite often I didn't ask for their names since meetings took place in a hurry or difficult circumstances.

The examples:

*** On the morning of the eleventh I had seen a boy of 16 who had a cut in his ear caused by a very sharp instrument. The boy and his father told me that he and two of his friends (15 and 17) had been picked up by the military in the middle of the night and taken to a police station in Comoro. Their torturors (I don't know if they were police , military or otherwise) had threatened they would cut of their ears. They hadn't done this, but they had caused a deep cut in the boy's ear with a razor blade. One of his friends was treated alike. They had pulled his ear forward and had made a deep cut at the back of his ear where it joins the head. They were accused of being involved in anti-Indonesian activities.
The priest with whom I spoke shortly afterwards tried to assure me that he hears alike stories - arrests without reason, torture, deaths threats, disappearances- regularly.

*** The week previously I had seen a young man (around 18) who was hiding from the Indonesion military after the murder of Sebastian Gomes Rangel at the Motael church (28/10/91). This young man felt desperate and looked extremely nervous. He was convinced that the murder of Sebastian was part of a clean-up action by the Indonesion military as part of their preparations for the arrival of the international delegation. He was convinced that it was just a matter of time before he -and hundreds of others in simular situations- would be picked up by the military, tortured and murdered. "They want to murder all of us", he said.

*** In Dili I heard the story that in preperation for the arrival of the international delegation ALL East Timorese people had to attend meetings with Indonesian officials . These officials warned the population that they

would end up in the holes recently dug by the military, if they talked to the international delegation during their visit. The holes were all located, it was said by locals, on spots known as former mass graves and spots where extra-judicial killings had taken place. Named were Taci Tolu, Aires Branca, Comoro, Baucau and other places I don't recall, but totaling about eight or nine around the country.
A girl (16) confirmed this story. She told how her, and two other schools, had been called together for a meeting at which an Indonesian official made the threat that all people who dared to approach the international delegation would end up in Taci Tolu, a spot close to Dili where many extra- judicial killings have taken place in the past.
I visited Taci Tolu and indeed saw fresh digging marks of a bulldozer which was still standing at the spot. The holes however were very shallow (about 40 cm) and we did not see them as a mass grave, but on the other hand we couldn't find any logical explanation for their presence. Maybe they were not finished yet? (East Timorese sources reported that corpses of the 12th November were burnt and then buried on this same spot.)
Some one in Baucau again confirmed that personel was called together and that the same kind of threat was made.

*** We attended the funeral of Sebastian Gomes Rangel who had been shot by the military in the night of the 27th/28th of October on the grounds of the Motael Church. About three thousand people attended the funeral. People of all ages prayed along the way to Santa Cruz cemetery and shouted many times in union : "Viva Timor Leste". That day it became clear for us that day that 'the resistance' obviously did not consist of "just a small group of radical students".

*** I heard from another foreigner in Dili that he had spoken to an East Timorese who saw how a few of the people, arrested at the Motael church (28/10/91), had been tortured: they were beaten with battons on the back of their heads and were cut with knives across their breasts. Figures of arrested people on the 28th Ocober differed. Someone said there were 32, including people who were for other reasons -than seeking refuge for the military- in the church. By the eleventh of November it was said that at least seven of them were still detained in Polwil/Comoro. Family members were too afraid to inquire if and why they were still detained.

*** Russell and I traveled by bus to Baucau and by motor-bike to Maubisse and Same. We were stopped at military checkpoints outside Dili and asked questions by police and/or military in every town/village we stopped. There didn't excist any uniformity ; every checkpoint was different. A few examples: our bags, papers and passports were thoroughly searched, another time they only glanced throught our passports, yet another time they would take notes from only one of us, write down exactly the time of passing, duration of travel, destination etc etc .
We saw military vehicles everywhere we went, a few times we saw

convoys consisting over ten trucks, one time we passed 24 military trucks each one with about thrirty soldiers.
Even in the smallest village (15 huts) there would be military present. One time we stopped to take a picture of a beautifull tradional house, but immidiately some military came running up and we weren't allowed to make the picture. The inhabitants who had been very friendly when we stopped looked terrified now and pleaded not to take a picture.
In Maubisse and Baucau military walked armed through the marketplace. It was impossible to talk to East Timorese people. The only people who approached us were from Indonesian background (Bali, Flores, Java, Sumatra, Lombok and other places). They were eager to talk and accompany us everywhere.
It was said that in this period around 40.000 military were present in East-Timor.
Several East Timorese people told us that the military presence had intensified in the last few months because of the arrival of the international delegation but above all they tried to convince us that this situation was just more of the same as they have experienced it for the last sixteen years.

During our stay we met with other foreigners who were interested in the situation in East Timor. With them we regularly exchanged information.
Our observations during our travels outside Dili were confirmed by the other foreigners. They traveled to other parts of the country. It seemed that in Los Palos, Viqueque and Covalima even more military (check points) were present than in other places. Two of them told how they had seen that military walking around with their finger on the trigger in a full market place.
Two others were strongly advised by a priest to immediately leave the village, where they had just arrived. East Timorese seen speaking with foreigners would end up on the Indonesian death list, so they were assured.

*** I heard from several sources that many East Timorese people still live in abject poverty. A visit to the outskirts of Dili shows this clearly. It was said that most Indonesian aid benefits Indonesian transmigrants and that much money is spent with the aim to oppress the East Timorese more efficiently. Examples: improvement of infrastructure is undertaken to serve army movements, improvement of education to serve the acculturation proces, improvement of birth control to diminish East Timorese population numbers, improvement of agriculture by imposed resettlement to compel traditonal networks etc etc.

*** All foreigners we had contact with had heard from different East Timorese sources that people felt desperate when it became clear that the UN/Portugese Parliamentary delegation was not coming. Desparate because they feared Indonesian military would torture and kill them. Many people had stuck out their necks being involved with the preperations for a big

demonstration during the delegation's visit. They had dared to be involved because they expected some protection from the delegation, during and after their stay. They considered the delegation's visit of inmense importance: a chance in a lifetime to break out of their isolation and show the world of their suffering. They also viewed it as a genuine indication that the international community was finnaly prepared to initiate a proces to solve the problems by peaceful negotiations and a referendum.
When all this 'security' fell away , people were convinced that death would be their fate. They said the Indonesians had been gathering lists of names since many months of all of those who were suspected of having been involved in one way or the other with "Anti Indonesian activities" as the Indonesians described the preparations. They said that it would just be a matter of time before the Indonesian army, police and intelligent service would systhematically torture and kill all those on their lists.
They begged us to tell 'the world' to send international observers and were convinced that only a UN peace keeping force would see to the safety of East Timorese people.

*** General: East Timor is not a country where you can just walk up to people and ask their opinion. If we, for example, asked in the bus other passengers why there were so many military, they would turn away and not answer. We were warned several times that we as foreigners were relatively safe, but that East Timorese whom we talked to, would be in danger. Therefore it is impossible to visit people, who are known to be against, or critical of the Indonesian occupation, in their own homes or in public places.
It is important to note that, although we only spent a short period in East Timor, I think we did hear and see relatively a lot, because we had contact with other (well informed) foreigners and because we could move relatively unrestricted unlike official visitors.
We had relative freedom to inform ourselves. Of course we personally met and heard a lot about plain clothes police (including East Timorese) who continually try to follow **everybody**.

These are the examples which I remember I gave to Prof. Kooijmans, trying to describe what I had experienced in a country in which a normal human existence did not seem possible due to Indonesian presence.

The 12th November.

Late on the eleventh of November we heard that the next day a mass would take place and afterwards a demonstration to the cemetery Santa Cruz which would continue to the house of Bishop Belo and then to the Hotel Turismo where Prof. Kooijmans was staying. It seemed that the demonstration, originally planned to take place during the visit of the

UN/Portugese Parliamentary delegation, was planned to take place now.

I didn't attend the mass nor demonstration due to backproblems, but my husband and six other foreigners were present. They were Russell Anderson, Bob Muntz from Australia, Amy Goodman and Alan Nairn from the USA, Steve Cox and Max Stahl from Great Britain. That same day I spoke to all of them, except for Kamal who died in the military hospital of shot wounds that same day.
In short they told me:
The mass took place just after six a.m. outside the Motael church, because the many people (three to four thousand) didn't fit inside the church. The people left just after seven towards the cemetery of Santa Cruz to lay flowers on Sebastio's grave. According to custom every week after a person dies. On the street banners were unfolded. They read: Viva Independence---Rather to die for freedom than to live in slavery---Portugal we are your responsibility---Viva Xanana Gusmao---Viva Timor Leste--- and many other alike slogans and flags of the combined independence parties.
Girls with flowerbaskets preceded the march. Most of the people were young students. Along the route other people joined, including children in schooluniform.
There was an atmosphere which was full of hope and expectations for a better future. But at the same time the atmospere was extremely tense due to the systhematic intimidation by Indonesian military preparing for the visit of the international delegation and East Timor's past in general.
A recognizable group of young men -marshalls- continually asked the people to stay calm and demonstrate orderly.
When a few young men were making a lot of noise by hitting a sign post, just passed the Governors buildings, they were immediately requested to stop, which hey did.
One of the foreigners saw one incident near the Resende Hotel, which is just opposite the Governors building. He saw how several soldiers walked up to some demonstrators and hit them with battons. The demonstrators took up stones and threw them towards the soldiers. Some windows (three) of shops were broken. The soldiers retreated and none of their colleagues standing next to them interfered further. The demonstrators continued walking and all was over in a few minutes.
Sometimes the demonstrators ran instead of walking. One of the foreigners who's condition is not so good, found himself often at the back or behind the demonstration. He didn't see any incidents or wounded soldiers or demonstrators along the route. He did see one young man in front of the cemetery with a bleeding lower leg. He could not understand the language but thought ther injured person tried to explain that his wound was caused by the military somewhere along the route.
Along the route the soldiers were standing back in front of their barracks, police stations and military offices.
The people, now between four and five thousand, arrived at the cemetery

before eight a.m. Some went inside to lay flowers on Sebastio's grave. When the first military arrived people started walking towards the direction of the Bishop's house and Hotel Turismo. More military arrived: three trucks full of military (about 80) and other soldiers (hundreds) on foot from the direction the people had come. The soldiers from the truck formed three lines. They wore a different uniform than the military who arrived on foot.

At this moment about one thousand people were standing in front of the cemetery, a few hundred were inside the cemetery, the rest had continued to walk towards the Bishop's house and Hotel Turismo.

At that time the two Americans stood in between the people and the military. Kamal very probably stood in the crowd closest to the military. The two British were inside the cemetery and the two Australians at the back of the crowd away from the military.

The two Americans said there was NO contact between the people and the military : the two groups stood about eighty (80) meters apart.

They told how the military had just moved up towards the people and started shooting into the crowd. They saw shot and injured people all around them.

The two Americans were severly beaten and felt their lives were only saved because a Red Cross person interfered and they could get away. The military had smashed their equipment and taken their money and one pasport.

They estimated to have seen about fifty bodies in front of the cemetery at the moment they left that spot.

I heard Kamal was shot several times and was bleeding profusively by the time he was found and brought to the military hospital, which took a very long time because the vehicle was held up several times by military.

The two Australians had started running with many others when they heard the first shots . They were followed by military and they heard regularly shots behind and beside them. People behind them were shot in the back while running.

Many people also tried to get away from the shooting by entering the cemetery. The cemetery however is surrounded by high walls (about two meters high) and they couldn't get away. The military entered the cemetery. By this time the initial continuous burst of firing which lasted two to three minutes had stopped, but sporadic firing continued in and around the cemetery for half an hour. While the two British were inside the cemetery, people were still being systematicly shot at, killed or injured by bayonets and beaten up. The military surrounded the cemetery.

One of the British had been hiding in the chapel in the middle of the cemetery. He was surrounded by severely wounded people and children under 10 were hiding under and behind him . After about half an hour the children were taken away by the military. Steve was taken too and he was beaten up severly. Some military wanted to kill him accussing him of being a collaberator because they were convinced he spoke Portugese. A man in plain clothes with a walkie talkie interfered and had taken him away. He

is convinced they would have shot him too, had this man, who seemed to be in charge, not intervened.
He was taken by the military to a police station, questioned and released after about two hours.
He said he saw at least one hundred bodies on the cemetery when he was taken away. He also saw how many (wounded) people were being dragged away like meat over the ground and thrown on to several trucks standing in front of the cemetery.
The other foreigner on the cemetery was also taken to the police station. They let him go at the end of the afternoon. He was not beaten.
None of the foreigners who had walked through the crowd in front of the cemetery had seen any of the people having stones, knives, machetes, sticks or any other objects that can be used as a weapon.

Around ten/eleven the streets of Dili were deserted, shops were closed.
In the morning and afternoon I visited several places where people, who had been at the cemetery, were hiding. Many were wounded. Most, including the foreigners, were scared the military would still come and round everybody up who had been present at the massacre.
Around one o'clock I heard a single shot at the back of the house of the Bishop.
The surrounding of the cemetery was cordoned off, but when we passed around four o'clock that afternoon they were all gone. Nobody was allowed to visit the military hospital where the most badly wounded seemed to have been taken.
That night more shots were heard in the south of Dili.
The next day Dili appeared quite normal , but I hardly saw East Timorese people in the streets. Again I visited several places where people were seeking refuge. They were too scared to go to the hospital or home.
Again people begged me to take the message of their suffering outside and tell that East Timor needs international observers and a peace keeping force. They said the massacre of yesterday should not be seen as an incident but as one example of many. They certainly feared the future.

Russel and I left East Timor the next day.
What happened after we left, we of course don't know. Exactly this fact of **not** knowing, describes for me most clearly what the situation is like in East Timor.
The fact that foreigners were eyewitnesses of the massacre, meant that it made 'big' news in several parts of the world.
The stories of the foreigners were believed, printed and broadcasted.
After we left a stream of stories came from East Timorese sources: stories of (mass) executions, massgraves, torture, disappearances all over the country etc. etc.
These stories were and are not widely published because they "cannot be

verified by reliable sources". This is of course partly grounded but also extremely sad. It shows distrust towards East Timorese people and it shows to which extreme degree East Timorese people are isolated. The fact that foreign journalists, inside and outside East Timor, are virtually incapable of checking these stories, shows to my view how tight Indonesion control is or, with other words, how afraid many East Timorese people are.

I hope the international community will seriously listen to the plight of the East Timorese people and take all neccesary measurements which will contribute towards the safety of the East Timorese people and will lead to a long term peaceful solution in accordance with the wishes of the East Timorese people themselves.

With all sincerity,

Amsterdam, 10 Dec 1991

Saskia Kouwenberg
c/o Burg. Mandersloan 36
4881 EJ ZUNDERT
The Netherlands